



## “Better”

As Dianna wades through choppy waters, “presenting” an ever-changing kaleidoscope of “discomforts,” a continuing stream of friends and family visit. So much love, but none of them fully appreciate, understandably so, what she is going through. She doesn’t help them much, either. I listen to her when people ask how she is doing.

“Better,” she invariably says.

One day I’m thinking about this new word in her lexicon, one of her favorites these days. Is she saying this because she really believes it? Yes.

I live with her every day, but I can’t really know what it’s like being in her body. So my appreciation for what she is up against slips through my consciousness, unnoticed, like the wind through the trees. When something is always there, it often becomes invisible.

What I do notice is, with each setback, it may take her an hour or a day to process her anger, disappointment, sadness; but it’s never long before she just somehow *changes her mind* about it. Instead of sliding into a pity party, or even doing a “grin and bear it” routine, she reliably chooses to genuinely *let it go*, exiting each valley with renewed optimism and resolve, showcased with the same scintillating smile emerging from deep within her being. She is focused like a laser beam on living her life as fully as possible, on doing her Work.

I am struck full force by the pain she is mastering only when I’m rubbing lotion into her cracking, bleeding feet, or massaging her legs because they hurt so much, or changing her diaper again, or....

In return, I get all the Hi, honeees I always got.

Her favorite therapy is working on *her* home, or visiting and receiving her huge collection of friends and family. My favorite therapy is to walk with Cracker in some nearby woods or field, and occasional fall grouse

and deer hunting trips with my sons and brother.

One winter day, Cracker and I make our way across an open field through a couple inches of snow and into a cluster of evergreens surrounding a frozen swamp. I sit down on a snow-covered log while Cracker drifts off on his own, nosing around. A metallic gray sky spreads a silver patina over everything—the prickly firs and soft cedars surrounding me, the tufts of grass poking through the snow, even the snow itself.

I start thinking about “better.” If sometimes her situation looks better to me, and other times worse, why does she always believe things are better?

People thrown to be more cynical or “realistic” may look at her as incredibly unrealistic, even foolish. But it is clear to me, it is *their* attitude that’s foolish. She is reliably hard-nosed, deals with the facts as they are, and she can read what she is up against better than anyone I know. So they just don’t get it.

But get what, exactly?

Cracker lets out a bark deep into the swamp, and I wonder what he’s up to now. After considering all my options, I decide to let him be. He’s a big boy.

A flash of insight. Dianna somehow, naturally I think, comprehends the power of creating from a future she can imagine rather than surrendering to current circumstances, whatever they happen to be. She ignores conventional wisdom and lives from her own inner wisdom.

Maybe at some level, she is in touch with her spiritual path and, as long as she is on that path, things *are* “better” no matter what the circumstances look like. This feels somehow authentic. I’m excited. I’m onto something true.

Does she consciously know this? I doubt it. I think it is part of the natural Talent she brought with her into this reality, like red roses bring red, or Cracker, his desire to hunt.

A crow screams its disapproval somewhere on the other side of the swamp. Maybe Cracker. I whistle for him, and a few minutes later he shows up, trotting casually toward me, looking satisfied and content. Who knows what the hell he has been up to, but he looks happy.

Me, too.

I stand up, ready to go. My ass is wet. What I get for sitting in one spot for too long.

As I start back, I’m thinking, no one will ever know how incredibly

satisfying it is to live with this woman, no matter what the circumstances. The best part of *my* “better” is her being in my life.

Cracker counts real big for me, too, I’m thinking, as I watch him pushing through some naked dogwood surrounded by died-back ferns, maybe ten yards ahead of me. The light is fading fast now as we follow a deer trail that looks like an expressway, taking us around the swamp and out of the woods.

The days are short now. It will be dark soon.